

Overview of California's 2006 Similar Schools Ranks Based on the API

This overview supplements information provided in the "Overview of California's 2006-07 Accountability Progress Reporting System" by providing additional information about Similar Schools Ranks requirements in California.

In March 2007, public schools in California received their 2006 Base Academic Performance Index (API) reports. The API is a numeric index (or scale) ranging from a low of 200 to a high of 1000 and continues to be the cornerstone of the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999. It measures a school's academic performance and growth.

API Reports Include API Ranks

Statewide ranks and similar schools ranks are reported in the Base API reports in addition to the school's Base API score. (For more information about Base and Growth API reports, please refer to the "Overview of California's 2006-07 Accountability Progress Reporting System" located on the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/apr/>.)

The 2006 Base API Report for a school includes the following:

- Number of Students Included in the 2006 Base API
- 2006 Base API (scale of 200 to 1000)
- 2006 Statewide Rank (scale of 1 to 10)
- 2006 Similar Schools Rank (scale of 1 to 10)
- 2006-07 API Growth Target
- 2007 API Target (2006 Base API + 2006-07 API Growth Target)
- Subgroup Information
- Demographic Characteristics
- Content Area Weights
- Similar Schools Report

Schools in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) and local educational agencies (LEAs) receive Base API scores but do not receive ranks or targets. (An LEA is a school district or county office of education.) A small school with between 11 and 99 valid scores receives an API and a statewide rank with an asterisk but no similar schools rank. (Asterisks denote APIs and ranks that are based on small numbers of test results.) These small schools are not included in calculating ranks for non-small schools but receive statewide ranks with an asterisk to indicate the rank into which their APIs would have fallen if they had been included in the ranking system.

What Are API Ranks?

API ranks show the relative placement (or ranking) of a school's API score compared to the APIs of other schools of the same type (elementary, middle, or high schools). A school's API is ranked on a scale of 1 to 10 compared with other schools. There are two kinds of API ranks: statewide rank and similar schools rank, as listed in the following table.

Two Kinds of Ranks: Statewide and Similar Schools

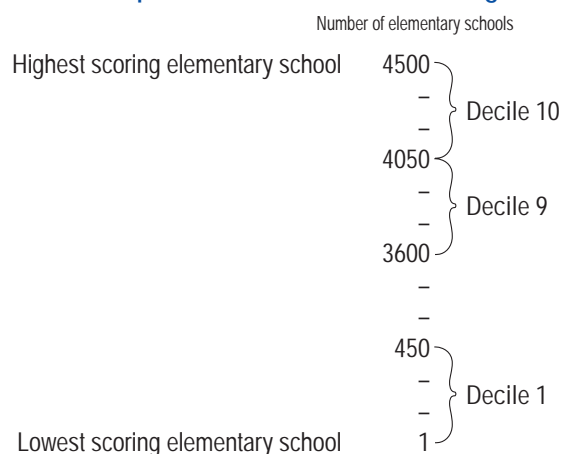
Statewide Ranks	Similar Schools Ranks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, or high school) ■ School's API compared to all other schools in the state of the same type 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, or high school) ■ School's API compared to 100 other schools that have similar opportunities and challenges

What Do API Ranks Mean?

Statewide Ranks

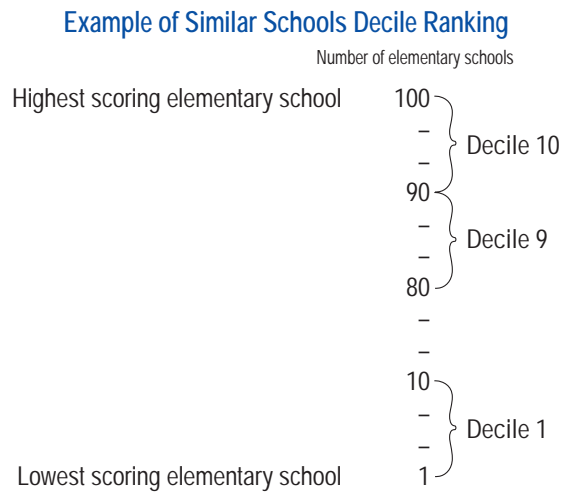
A statewide rank shows a school's relative API placement in a statewide distribution of API scores of schools of the same type. The distribution is the ranked APIs divided into ten equal groups (or deciles). In the following example, there are a total of 4,500 elementary school APIs, with 450 APIs in each decile. A school ranked in decile 10 would have an API that is in the top 10 percent of APIs in the state.

Example of Statewide Decile Ranking



Similar Schools Ranks

A similar schools rank is like the statewide rank except that the distribution is smaller because it only includes 100 schools. A similar schools rank shows a school's relative placement compared to 100 other schools with similar opportunities and challenges. The 100 similar schools are selected based on several key demographic characteristics. (The characteristics are listed at the bottom of page 3.) In the example below, there are a total of 100 elementary schools, and 10 elementary schools are in each decile. A school with a similar schools rank of 10 would have an API that is in the top 10 percent of 100 other schools with similar characteristics.



The table at the bottom of this page describes different levels of similar schools ranks.

How Are API Ranks Calculated?

Statewide Ranks

To calculate statewide ranks, schools' Base API scores are separated by school type: elementary, middle, and high school. For each of the three types, schools' API scores are first sorted from lowest to highest statewide and then divided into ten equal groups (or deciles) ranked from lowest (1) to highest (10). A school's statewide rank is determined by which of the ten deciles its API falls within.

Similar Schools Ranks

To calculate similar schools ranks, schools' Base API scores are separated by school type: elementary, middle, and high schools. As shown in the table below, three main steps are used to calculate the rank for each of the three school types.

Steps to Calculate Similar Schools Rank For Each School Type

Steps	Description
1.	A School Characteristics Index (SCI) for the school is calculated. An SCI is a composite number representing the school's demographic characteristics. (The characteristics are listed at the bottom of page 3.) It is calculated through a statistical procedure that produces a single index (which is the SCI), based on all of the factors included. Schools with SCIs that are close in numerical value face similar but not necessarily identical educational opportunities and challenges.
2.	A comparison group of 100 similar schools is formed for the school, based on similar SCIs. The comparison group is formed by taking the 50 schools with SCIs just above the school's SCI and the 50 just below.
3.	The school's similar schools rank is calculated by first sorting from lowest to highest the Base APIs of the comparison group of 100 similar schools and then dividing the sorted APIs into ten equal groups (or deciles), from lowest (1) to highest (10). A school's similar schools rank is determined by which of the ten deciles its API falls within.

How Are Similar Schools Ranks Used?

California public schools serve students with many different backgrounds and needs. As a result, schools face different educational challenges. The similar schools ranks allow schools to look at their academic performance compared to other schools with some of the same opportunities and challenges.

The similar schools ranks can be used in at least two ways. First, schools can use this information as a reference point for judging their academic achievement against other 100 schools facing similar opportunities and challenges. Second, schools may improve their academic performance by studying what similar schools with higher rankings are doing.

Description of Similar Schools Ranks

The similar schools ranks compare an individual school's API to the 100 schools in its comparison group. Schools are ranked in ten equal groups (deciles) from the lowest (1) to the highest (10). A description of the similar schools ranks follows:

Similar Schools Rank	Description
9 or 10	This school's API is: Well-above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
7 or 8	Above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
5 or 6	About average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
3 or 4	Below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
1 or 2	Well-below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics

Frequently Asked Questions

The comparison of similar schools is required by the PSAA and provides additional information about schools beyond what is provided by APIs and statewide ranks. The PSAA requires that similar schools comparisons be based on specified school demographic characteristics (shown in the table below).

Do all 100 schools in the same similar schools rank (the comparison group) have the same demographic characteristics?

Each school is unique; therefore, it is impossible to find similar schools that match in every way. The procedure used in calculating each SCI allows for some differences between schools in order to form large enough groups of similar schools for meaningful ranks.

Does the comparison group for a school remain the same from year to year?

No. Demographic characteristics change from year to year. In March 2007, schools received a 2006 similar schools rank, which compared the schools' 2006 API level to a group of 100 similar schools. In March 2008, schools will receive a 2007 similar schools rank which will compare their 2007 API level to a *new* group of 100 similar schools. The new group of 100 similar schools may change substantially from the previous year.

How can I find out which schools are in the comparison group for a school?

The list of the 100 schools and the Base APIs of the schools included in each school's similar schools comparison group can be found in a school's Similar Schools Report on the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/api/>. Click on "Reports" and "School Level Reports" and type the name of the school. On the school report, click on "Similar Schools Report" in the upper right section of the page.

How can another school in the school district have similar students and almost exactly the same API score but a different "similar schools" rank?

The SCIs are calculated using many demographic characteristics. Even if schools appear quite similar in some characteristics, they may differ with respect to others. Small differences in two schools' demographic characteristics can result in different SCIs and, therefore, in different groups of similar schools. The two schools' ranks may differ if one school's comparison group has a different range of API scores than the other school's comparison group.

The similar schools rank for our school is higher (about the same, lower) than its statewide rank. How should that be interpreted?

Similar schools ranks are calculated in completely different ways. The statewide API rank compares a school to other schools statewide. The similar schools rank compares a school to only 100 schools similar to it.

Does the calculation of the API or similar schools ranks affect the scores a student receives on statewide tests?

No. The calculation of the API and the similar schools ranks does not affect the score a student receives on statewide tests.

How can the similar schools rank for a school be raised?

The SCI, from which the group of similar schools is determined, is designed to reflect demographic characteristics **not** under a school's control. The school should focus on ways to raise its API by improving instruction and academic achievement. These efforts should help improve the academic growth of the school, its API, and its school rankings.

Demographic Characteristics Used for Similar Schools Ranks

Student mobility	Average class size
Student ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kindergarten to grade three Grades four to six
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> African American (not of Hispanic origin) Hispanic or Latino American Indian or Alaska Native Pacific Islander Asian White (not of Hispanic origin) Filipino 	Core academic courses in departmentalized programs
School socioeconomic status	Whether the school operates a multi-track, year-round educational program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent education level or Student participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program (also known as the National School Lunch Program, or NSLP) 	Grade span enrollments
Teachers who are fully credentialed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade two Grades seven to eight Grades three to five Grades nine to eleven Grade six
Teachers who hold emergency credentials	Students in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program
Students who are English learners	Students with disabilities
	Reclassified fluent-English-proficient (RFEP) students
	Students who participate in migrant education program